help improve primary health care in India starting with pilot projects in two or more States. Funds will be provided by the Government of India, State Governments concerned and AAPI. The MoU will be implemented in a time bound manner.

Voting Rights to NRIs and PIOs

1827. SHRI JANARDHANA POOJARY: Will the Minister of OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government are contemplating to allow NRIs and PIOs to enroll themselves in electoral rolls and exercise voting right in various elections in India, including Parliamentary and Assembly elections; and

(b) if so, the details in this regard, with details of the criteria laid down for such enrolment and the number of NRIs and PIOs from different countries likely to avail this privilege, country-wise?

THE MINISTER OF OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS (SHRI VAYALAR RAVI): (a) and (b) Yes. A Proposal for giving voting rights to Indian citizens only (not PIOs) who are away from their place of residence on account of employment, education or otherwise has been approved by the Government. A Bill in this regard has been introduced in the Rajya Sabha on 28th February, 2006.

Development of Panchayati Raj Institutions

1828. SHRI GIREESH KUMAR SANGHI: Will the Minister of PANCHAYATI RAJ be pleased to state:

(a) whether any new method have been proposed in the last five years to further develop Panchayati Raj Institution;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF PANCHAYATI RAJ (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AlYAR): (a) to (c) Prior to the setting up of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, the Ministry of Rural Development was the nodal Ministry for Panchayati Raj Institutions. A Conference of State Ministers of Panchayati Raj was held on 11th July 2001 at New Delhi to discuss the measures to be taken to devolve functions and powers in accordance with the provisions of the

Constitution. In pursuance of the Resolution of the Conference, the Ministry of Rural Development constituted a Task Force on devolution of Powers and functions to Panchayati Raj Institutions. The Task Force submitted its report on 31.8.2001, which was sent to all States for their consideration.

An empowered Sub-Committee on Financial and Administrative Empowerment of Panchayati Raj Institutions under the Chairmanship of Minister for Rural Development was set up in March 2003 by Planning Commission, in pursuance of a decision taken in the National Development Council. The Terms of Reference of the Sub-Committee include, *inter-alia*, working out the modalities for strengthening the financial domain of the PRIs through transfer of resources from the Centre and State Governments, assessing the capacity of the PRIs to raise revenues and other resources and to develop an action plan in this regard and analyzing the capability of PRIs at different levels to absorb the financial allocation made to the PRIs under different schemes and to develop a framework to ensure fiscal discipline and financial accountability at different levels of PRIs. The Empowered Sub-Committee has held two meetings so far. The last meeting was held on 7th August 2003. The Empowered Sub-Committee has been reconstituted on 14.9.2005 with the Union Minister of Panchayati Raj as the Chairperson and the Minister of Rural Development as a member of the sub-Committee.

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj was set up on 27 May 2004. After the Ministry was set up, a Conference of Chief Ministers and State Ministers in charge of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj on "Poverty Alleviation and Rural Prosperity through Panchayati Raj" was organized at New Delhi on 29-30 June 2004, jointly by the Ministry of Rural Development and the Ministry of Panchayati Raj. The Conference was inaugurated by the Prime Minister. Issues relating to effective implementation of Part IX and IX A of the Constitution on Panchayati Raj were tabled as agenda for discussions by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj. These issues included effective devolution of functions, finances, functionaries, planning, Gram Sabhas, women, reservation for SCs/STs, special problem of SCs/STs, elections, audit, parallel bodies, capacity building and training, and state of the Panchayat Report and jurisprudence. The Conference decided to hold seven Round Table Conferences to formulate a draft action plan towards achiving the objective of

strengthening of Panchayati Raj Institutions to enable them to emerge as institutions of self-government for the planning and implementation of programmes of economic development and social justice as envisioned in the Constitution. Between July-December, 2004 Ministry of Panchayati Raj convened seven Round Table Meetings with the State Ministers in charge of Panchayati Raj and evolved by consensus a set of ground 150 points for action which have been put together in a compendium that was adopted unanimously at the conclusion of the last Round Table in Jaipur.

A Council of State Ministers of Panchayati Raj under the Chairmanship of the Union Minister for Panchayati Raj has been constituted to review the implementation of the recommendations. The first meeting of the Council was held on 5th-6th August 2005 at Kochi, Kerala. A Committee of Chief Secretaries of States and State Panchayati Raj Secretaries has also been constituted under the Chairmanship of the Union Secretary (Panchayati Raj) to monitor the progress on the implementation of the 150 recommendations of the Seven Round Tables and the decisions of the Council of States Ministers of Panchayati Raj. Four review meetings of the Committee have so far been held in April 2005, June, 2005, September, 2005, and November 2005.

With a view to interacting with Panchayats and carrying out a review with the authorities concerned of the progress in implementing the points for action mutually agreed to in the Round Tables, a process of visiting the States and UTs at the level of Union Minister for Panchayati Raj has been initiated. Eight States and two Union Territories have been covered so far. These include Karnataka, West Bengal, Uttaranchal, Haryana, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Arunachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Lakshadweep and Chandigarh. Each visit is concluded with a Statement of Conclusions jointly signed with the Chief Minister of the State concerned, laying out the points of action on which the State would move to operationalise the recommendations of the Round Tables.

An exercise is underway to review different statues with a view to harmonise them with the provisions of Part IX of the Constitution. Similarly, the guidelines of Centrally Sponsored Schemes are being reviewed to ensure the centrality of Panchayats in planning and implementation. As regards new Centrally Sponsored Schemes, it is proposed to provide for a central role for Panchayats wherever relevant. Thus, for example, the

National Rural Employment Guarantee Act provides for the Panchayats to be the "principal authorities" for the planning and implementation, of schemes under the Act. Steps are also being taken to fill in critical gaps in infrastructure and capacity so that Panchayats can effectively fulfill their constitutional role.

Grants to Panchayats

1829. SHRI RAMA MUNI REDDY SIRIGREDDY: SHRI K. RAMA MOHANA RAO:

Will the Minister of PANCHAYATI RAJ be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the 12th Finance Commission has recommended and released some grants to States;

(b) if so, whether it is a fact that no grants have been released to Panchayats and Municipalities in the State of Andhra Pradesh whereas the funds have been released to States such as Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, etc.;

(c) if so, the reasons for not releasing the funds to the Panchayats and Municipalities in Andhra Pradesh; and

(d) the total amount recommended by the 12th Finance Commission for Panchayats for the period 2005-10?

THE MINISTER OF PANCHAYATI RAJ (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) Yes, sir. The 12th Finance Commission's mandate was to recommend the measures needed to augment the Consolidated Fund of a State to supplement the resources of the Panchayats and the municipalities in the State on the basis of the recommendations made by the Finance Commission of the State.

(b) to (d) The 12th Finance Commission has recommended a sum of Rs. 25,000 crore for the period 2005-10 as grants-in-aid to augment the Consolidated Fund of States to supplement the resources of the Municipalities and the Panchayats.

A total grant of Rs. 20,000 crore for the Panchayati Raj Institutions and Rs. 5,000 crore for the urban local bodies have been allocated to the States for the period 2005-10. These grants are released subject to the submission/fulfillment of the information/conditions laid in the guidelines issued by the Ministry of Finance.